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Goddess of France, 1745-1764:
Madame de Pompadour and the Rococo Traditions of 18th-Century French Paintings

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ARTH 492: Madame de Pompadour and the Rococo Tradition
Final Paper
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In France during the mid-18th century, King Louis XV enjoyed the aftershocks of his great-grandfather's absolute central power at the esteemed Palace of Versailles. However, as successful as Louis XIV; his great-grandfather, the "Sun King," was, Louis XV's cultural successes were directed to his Mistress, Madame de Pompadour, nurturing France's classical art sphere. Paris was the center of the world during the 18th and 19th centuries, encapsulating monarchies with wars and creating ripples in every nation and colony through their societal trends of fashion and architecture. Art was one of the easiest ways to explore the ideals of a nation as a colonial superpower, and as such, France employed the Rococo style to romanticize the overflowing frivolity of its elite upper classes.

Jeanne-Antoinette Poisson (1721-1764), known as Madame or Marquise de Pompadour to the French royal court, used her deep influence as King Louis XV's head-mistress and unofficial advisor to define the Rococo art style and cement the new image of an educated Mistress by exploiting her femininity and education in royal portraits, identifying the role of the Mistress was a forum to reinvent her image in society. Jeanne-Antoinette would grow into one of the most powerful women in France before Marie Antoinette, becoming a trusted advisor to Louis XV and controlling the art scene through the Rococo art period through portraiture of both stately and mythological, Pompadour embraces the tradition of the Rococo period by disguising herself as well-known virtues, but also adds her personality and education to form a well-rounded image fit for the title of "Queen" that she would never receive.

The sources for this individual are numerous, as I tried my best to cross-reference details in case of author bias. Art can be very subjective, especially when the art is that of a society that liked to use subtle symbols to only be read by certain class levels. In the case of Pompadour, the references can vary definitions of the meanings of certain items, like the flower meanings in her

portraits, to the motifs on her dress. I used two types of sources: historical references for the reign of Louis XV and art historical sources on Pompadour to create a coherent context behind the two types of portraits. General historical sources like Robert Neuman's *Baroque and Rococo Art* textbook provide the necessary worldly trends for me to place Pompadour's symbols, while the art catalogue of *La Volupte du Gout: French Painting in the Age of Madame de Pompadour*, by the Portland Art Museum is a specialized reference which I rely upon heavily because of its extensive collaboration with the French art history field.

I. Pompadour and the Social Identity

Pompadour's preceding mistresses number into the hundreds, but there are three specific women that have a direct influence on how Pompadour crafts her identity. One of these women is Pompadour's own mother, Louise-Madeleine de La Motte, whose background in the underpinnings of the upper class gave Pompadour a step closer to Louis XV before she was even born. *Une femme Galante*, a woman of the night who used her feminine features to entertain men with money.¹ These women not completely relying on sexual experiences and were considered to be talented in conversation and crafts, *femme Galante* were closer to the Japanese *Oiran* than to the western example of prostitute. As the career of La Motte brought her close to the wealthier elite of France through seduction, her parents saw the possibility of public scandal as a larger problem than their daughter's sexual expression. However, her career as a *femme Galante* did not end as she was married to Francois Poisson, a man of dubious standing in the crafting of army supplies for France during the War of Spanish Succession.² Poisson was a widower, in his thirties, when he married the extremely young and attractive La Motte.³ After a marriage

¹Margaret Crosland, *Madame de Pompadour, Sex, Culture and Power*, Phoenix Hill: Sutton Publishing Limited, 2000, xxiii.

² Thomas E. Kaiser, "Madame de Pompadour and the Theaters of Power." *French Historical Studies* 19, no. 4 (1996):1028. <https://doi.org/10.2307/286662>.

³ Crosland, "Madamede Pompadour," xxiii.

ceremony in 1718, their first child, Jeanne-Antoinette Poisson, was born two years later in 1719.⁴ As Jeanne-Antoinette spent most of her upbringing under the care of a Catholic school while her parents were pushed into different spheres of life from her. She would not be with her father until she was fifteen years old, after he had been released from a period of exile that was placed on him shortly after she was born.⁵ So, La Motte's lifestyle must have had an influence on the young and ambitious Jeanne-Antoinette, who then would enter the world of the Parisian elite to climb the ranks as her mother unsuccessfully tried to do. Jeanne-Antoinette, or Pompadour as we'll call her for the rest of the paper, was married off in order to uplift her place in the nobility.

As she was installed within Louis XV's decision making relationships, Pompadour was able to establish her uncle, Charles Le Normant d'Tourneheim, and then soon after her brother, Abel Poisson, at the post of Director General des Batiments, a government position that would control the flow of money towards the king's art patronage.⁶ This would help Pompadour establish a connection between herself and the artisans, and eventually allow the artists to use her as a facial model for art and sculpture.

The title of Queen of France was a heavy position to bear, and was borne by Marie Leczinska, a modest princess from Poland who married Louis XV when they were in their early teenage years.⁷ Leczinska did not attempt to have any major political role other than that of the mother of the king's children. Bearing ten children, only seven which survive to adulthood, and only one of them male, Leczinska was the role model for a submissive wife. After quite close to fifteen years of continuous pregnancies, she began to reject his advances more frequently and causes a malaise of Louis XV's passion for most subjects.⁸ Leczinska's role in Louis XV's court

⁴ Crosland, "Madame de Pompadour," xxiii.

⁵ Crosland, "Madame de Pompadour," xxiv.

⁶ Donald Posner. "Mme. de Pompadour as a Patron of the Visual Arts." *The Art Bulletin* 72, no. 1 (1990): 74. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3045718>.

⁷ Evelyne Lever. *Madame de Pompadour: A Life*, New York: Farrer, Straus and Giroux, 2000.5

⁸ Lever, *Madame*, 7.

was the opposite of what Pompadour aspired to be. The queen went so far to even have her own image as a “common woman” painted by Jean-Marc Nattier to have a public relationship with the rising tide of middle class opportunities. This 1748 painting is titled, *Marie Leszcynska, Queen of France, Reading the Bible*, is a definite inspiration for Pompadour’s later portraits as an educated woman. Although Pompadour does not need to focus on proving herself as a pious woman, since many of the court saw mistresses as a negative and promiscuous presence, as seen in the *Poissonades*, a collection of anonymous poems discussed later in this paper. Pompadour is also documented as proposing to Louis XV a solution to the staleness of his marriage to his queen as a show of compassion for her “rival.”⁹

The last woman to have an extravagant influence on Pompadour is Madame de Chateaufoux, who was the immediate preceding mistress. Chateaufoux, whose real name was Marie-Anne de Mailly-Nesle, was the favorite mistress of Louis XV and unfortunately died in 1740, during the prime of her role with the King.¹⁰ Even though she was personally important to Louis XV, the rest of Versailles easily forgot mistresses as they were numerous and not all of them lived in the same parts of the court members’. The duties of a mistress were generally to be a companion to the King, in both contexts of the word, and be a support system for travels when the King was needed elsewhere.¹¹ They were a figurehead to the outside society, and a gear in the cog of the continuous spinning of French monarchy. Becoming the head mistress or *Maitresse-en-titre* did not have a specific role, but rather a more condensed mistress role. They reported directly to Louis XV.

⁹ Kaiser, “Madame,” 1028.

¹⁰ Lever, *Madame*, 5

¹¹ Tess Lewis. “Madame de Pompadour: Eminence without Honor.” *The Hudson Review* 56, no. 2 (2003): 303. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3853245>.

Unlike his great-grandfather, Louis “Sun King” XIV, Louis XV selected his mistresses by his feelings for them rather than their political advantages and connection. This made each mistress important to the court as an emotional brach for the King, and that each of them had a role in his life, even if they seemed to not have any outward power. Chateauroux was disliked outside of the court and had three sisters that would come to court in the two years after her death; leaving a negative connotation of the title of Mistress by the surrounding Versailles court memebers at Louis XV’s depression after her passing. One summer night, the annual Yew Ball to announce the engagement of the Dauphin was held at Senart, a kingly estate that neighbored the grounds of the d’Etoilles, that of Pompadour and her husband, Charles Guillaume Le Normant d’Etiolles. She separated from her short marriage in 1745 as she was being inducted as marquise de Pompadour into the court of Louis XV.

Pompadour and Louis XV’s sexual relationship only lasted from 1745-1751, evolving into a platonic (almost sibling) relationship as Louis began to confide in her.¹² As she morphed in this relationship, so did her reputation. Her mother, La Motte, was not exactly *known*, but was visited by enough of the upper class to be considered as one of the top femme Galantes in her brushes with court members. Though this was a lower version of being a King’s Mistress, this made Pompadour an easy target of ridicule. Recitations of infamous scandalized poems called *Poissonades* were passed through the court behind both Pompadour and the King’s back.¹³ They were titled after Pompadour’s maiden name, which means “fish” in French, and went as follows:

“The great lords abase themselves,
The financiers enrich themselves,
All the Poissons [Fish] are getting big,
It is the reign of the scoundrels . . .

¹² “Madame de PompadourArtworks,” *ARTUK.org*, accessed April 2, 2022.
https://artuk.org/discover/artworks/madame-de-pompadour-209442/search/keyword:pompadour--referrer:global-search/page/1/view_as/grid

¹³Lewis, “Eminence,” 303.

A little bourgeoisie,
 Raised to be a slut,
 Brings everything down to her level
 And makes the court a slum...¹⁴

Even more so, there are two types of Mistresses a lover of the King could fall into: the Private or the Titular. Private mistresses are exactly as they sound, women kept out of the spotlight and away from any court related-activities that took place at Versailles.¹⁵ Titular mistresses were the public lovers and confidants of the King, and could be included in court proceedings.¹⁶ It is important to note that even though Pompadour's legacy is a long reaching one, she did not have absolute power. Louis XV was a king, albeit a young one, but he still had control of the decisions of his court and their own solutions. She may have influenced Louis during high-profile problems as a confidant, but she was not using her closeness as a way to sway any political power towards her. This could have backfired on her horribly if she made a public decree of some sort, so her influence is mostly on the socio-cultural rather than socio-political.

a. Frivolity as a Full-Time Job

Rococo was an art stylistic period formed from 1720-1780 CE was a higher and more delicate version of the Baroque period of 1600-1720 CE.¹⁷ Acting as a sort of refocusing of subject-matter, Rococo became a romanticization of both the peasant and elite classes. A sensual focus to the mundane and incorporated bright pastels into both art and architecture. The small inner branching of Rococo that will be talked about in this paper is the Late Classicism or true Rococo due to its return to a standardized form of ideal body types and clean, prominent classical motifs.¹⁸ Furniture, which features heavily in Pompadour's court portraits, is sinuous

¹⁴Lewis, "Eminence," 304.

¹⁵Penelope fHunter-Stiebel. *La Volupte du Gout: French Painting in the Age of Madame de Pompadour*, Portland: Art Stock Books, Limited, 2008.

¹⁶ Hunter-Stiebel, *La Volupte Gout*, 42.

¹⁷ Victoria Charles and Klaus Carl. "Rococo," Parkstone International, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/umw/detail.action?docID=887049>.

¹⁸ Charles, "Rococo."

and gilded with gold, showcasing the frivolous wealth of her position even though her symbolism of scholarship was undeniable. The culture around art showings was an upper class activity, holding *Salons* in private homes to not only show off the wealth of the person, but the amount of art they could afford.¹⁹ Pioneering artists for Pompadour's light style of Rococo were Jean-Antoine Watteau (1684-1721), Francois Boucher (1703-1770), and Jean-Marc Nattier (1685-1766). Soft pastels, hazy brushstrokes and illumination of the face and collarbone are shared characteristics of their work. Boucher in particular has been called out from Enlightenment authors, such as Diderot and Voltaire, as depicting a lifestyle that goes against all human inclinations and is suffocated by powdered wigs and cheese.²⁰ Another artist that is within Rococo, but brings Pompadour's image into the Late Classicism period is Charles-Andre van Loo, a French painter who understood the rich saturations of jewel tones to interpret the exoticism of Pompadour's private rooms within some of her mythological paintings.

One of the rising reasons for Pompadour to identify herself as an educated woman was to gain the trust of the women within the middle classes. Though she already had power as one of the closest people to the king, she needed public approval, especially as the rumors of revolution began to rise in the later part of her reign. Middle class economics were steadily getting better, allowing for more opportunities for women like reading and working in craft jobs of spinning and sewing.²¹ In all of her court portraits, Pompadour paints herself as one of these educated women in her choice of depicted literature from the Enlightenment, as well as musical and crafting hobbies. The two most popular types of painting were pastel and oil. All of the paintings within this study are oil paintings, due to the connection with more classical painting techniques.

¹⁹ Hunter-Stiebel, *La Volupte du Gout*, 21-22.

²⁰ Charles, "Rococo."

²¹ Mary L. Bellhouse, "Visual Myths of Female Identity in Eighteenth-Century France." *International Political Science Review / Revue Internationale de Science Politique* 12, no. 2 (1991): 117-35.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1601392>. 123

Oil paintings required lots of time for both the paint to dry and for the models to sit as the artist worked. Many of the paintings that show the full body of Pompadour are actually modeled by another woman, possibly even a servant or the daughter of one of the other mistresses.

II. Court Portraiture for an Educated Rococo Mistress

This type of Rococo can be classified as late Rococo, a standardized, but sensual styling meant to propose an image for the portrait subject. Pompadour's important position in both social and political circles meant that any image of her had to be reviewed for every small detail to make sure that none of them would cause any amount of scandal. Though Mistresses themselves were technically scandals already, Rococo's use of tiny details with implicit meanings created a pathway for her to sprinkle in parts of her personality as her relationship. The three portraits chosen for this case study are put in chronological order as a progression of the maturing of Pompadour's public image, as well as how the symbols and trends change throughout her stately representation.

a. Innocence

One of the first court paintings of Pompadour is not by a hired court painter, but rather comes from the training generation of artists. *Madame de Pompadour* (Fig. 1), is an intimate picture of Pompadour as a sensual and graceful noblewoman. Though it only shows from her waist upwards, there are plenty of details that showcase who Pompadour is as a person. The Late Rococo was focused on the beauty of the natural world through artists such as Watteau and Boucher, who became pioneers for trends within the art schools of France. This portrait is not attributed to an artist, so there is no connection personally with Pompadour, but the use of her image within an educational setting means that she was important enough for the next generation of artists to know how to paint. This oval oil painting shows Pompadour in a traditional bust,

with her head, turned to the left side, leaving the viewer with her typical three-quarter view of her face. It accentuates her soft and feminine jawline highlighted with a pink blush. Her skin seems to glow against the dramatically dark brown background, and her neck is free from any necklace or collars. This lack of cameo necklaces or brooches of representative objects makes her neutral in her motivations for the portrait and connections.

Her hair is simple, yet elegantly braided away from her forehead and twisted with a garland of pink and white flowers. Her chest has a subtle hint of muscle in the twist of her neck and her shoulders are relaxed against her side. To the right, the slight swell of her left breast is visible as the ruffle of her collar and sleeve slip down her relaxed shoulder. This may be a study of a model not wearing proper undergarments, which would have secured the strap of her dress in place. This moment becomes even more intimate by this fact. A garland of various flowers is sewn into place on her right breast, covering any more possible undressing and adding to the feminine atmosphere of the portrait. A teal silken robe or even cloak is draped around her back and in the foreground. This detail makes this moment seem as if Pompadour was in a moment of undressing from a teal-colored dress, and these are in fact her undergarments. There is no known (or directly attributed) picture of Pompadour nude, but her face was placed on overtop models within other paintings that were semi-nude or nude. Boucher was one of them using Pompadour as a nymph's face in a set of paintings called *The Rising of the Sun* (Fig. 2) and *the Setting of the Sun* (Fig. 3).

As this composition of the stately bust was being interpreted by different studying artists, it represents the flurry of excitement that seemed to follow wherever Pompadour was involved, both in court and society. Pompadour was debuted on the Versailles court scene in 1745 and had

battled fragile health conditions since her childhood and needed to show strength in case any of the lower mistresses wanted to topple over her newfound fame as the King's favorite.

b. Maturity

Francois Boucher's *Madame de Pompadour* (Fig.) is an outdoor court portrait of a more mature mistress Pompadour, probably the furthest away from her true appearance. Pompadour leans against a statue of a young woman embracing a cherub. Around Pompadour is an outside garden lush with trees, flowers, and bushes. Her posture is more casual and somewhat awkward than in her sitting portraits. The far background is covered with tall bushes and trees that block any landscape to tell where on the property of Versailles this takes place, or they are there to hide the fact that it was modeled somewhere off the site of the Palace.

Pompadour's salmon or even light-orange dress is stark among the gradients of white roses and the greens of the various foliage surround. Her face, more brightly illuminated than the rest of her skin, maybe the same technique where her face was later pasted or drawn on after the painter has successfully finished the model's body. The expression on her face is almost one of smugness, but the interpretation of the mother and child statue behind her is an expression of knowledge than one of smugness.

Her dress is a typical robe a la Francaise, though it seems to have more lace detailing than any other depiction of her wardrobe. This particular dress may have been the most regal or public-ready for her to use at court. The overextravagant ruffles of her sleeves are disproportionate to the rest of the dress and maybe a symbol of her lack of physical activity or labor as a noblewoman of the court. This time, the double layer of the dress is completely visible,

with only a small peek of her heeled shoe underneath. The corset was making a comeback into the fashion world during the 18th century and gives Pompadour an ideal feminine form.²² A spotlight on this shoe represents her literally stepping into her early role as mistress to Louis XV. A white camellia flower pinned to her exposed neckline represents purity and wisdom, possibly signaling the virginal attitude towards this new career path.

c. Wisdom

Francois-Hubert Drouais' *Madame de Pompadour at her Tambour Frame* (Fig.) is one of the last portraits done of Madame de Pompadour. This painting is different in its representation of Pompadour and signifies her transition from a courtly woman of politics to one of art and knowledge. This large court portrait by Drouais was begun a year before Pompadour's death, where Drouais sketched and painted her face, then used a model for the sitting after she had passed away in 1764. Most of Pompadour's paintings were crafted this way. She was a busy person around the Palace of Versailles, being the close advisor to Louis XV and headmistress, so there was not enough time to have someone of her status sit for a painter all day. This could be a reason why the posing of her face in relation to her body seems disproportionate and disconnected in overall body language.

The understated yet visible red curtain drapes carelessly over a matching ottoman to Pompadour's front. One of the small black, fluffy Cocker Spaniels Pompadour is documented to have owned in Versailles, playfully stands on its hind legs, looking over the edge of the Tambour desk she is seated behind. A bookshelf, somewhat filled with a set of gold-colored books, rests behind her chair in the corner of the room, blocked to where only the top shelf is visible to the viewer. Some of the books have distinguishable spine titles

²² Jennifer Dawn Milliam. *Historical Dictionary of Rococo Art*. Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2011.

Stately, Pompadour sits upright in an ornately gilded chair within a plainly painted room. Her eyes are dark and stare out at the viewer with a content smile. Her hair is curled away from her forehead and covered with a lace-hemmed cap tied underneath her chin with a pink striped bow. In most portraits, Pompadour is represented by shorter, curled hairstyles, however, this is the only painting where most of her hair is covered. Is it possible this is a sign of her giving up entirely on the ornate traditions of over-the-top hairstyles that showcase status? Though she has never shown it in other portraits, this particular representation is more conservative and lends itself to a widening of Pompadour's womanly beauty. Her dress, yet again, is a Robe-a-la-Francaise, though this time seemingly made of cotton rather than silk. It is possible that Drouais chose to not have the light of the painting shine directly on the fabric of the material, instead of adding the ruffled texture in its place. Though most of her stomacher is hidden behind the table, a large pink, green, and white striped bow.

This new picture of Pompadour as a mature and crafting woman was something she wanted to avoid in the prime of her life because of the well-known medieval story, "The Three Spinners."²³ Though it does not use Tambour as its example, the story tells of a woman turned in to a "hag or an undesirable woman if she leads a life of flax spinning or craft."²⁴

III. Mythological Tradition in Rococo

Though the life of La Motte interacting with the upper class seems as if it would provide nicely for the family, Pompadour had a quieter childhood and adolescence. It does not seem like anything from her earlier life would cause her to want a depiction as a Roman Goddess. Instead,

²³ Bellhouse "Visual Myths," 118.

²⁴ Bellhouse, "Visual Myths," 117.

author Mary Bellhouse explains this tradition of putting a noble woman's face on a crucial mythological figure stems from a culture of two types of representation for women:

“The production of two varying types during the same period underscores how the female subject is being constantly re-presented. In both types the female gender, a socially constructed entity, is rendered essentially powerless, especially judged against contemporaneous representations of the male gender. The first type is the portraiture of dual identity drawn from classical mythology. In a sense, it looks backwards culturally; it loses its popularity in the second half of the century. The second type, found in Nattier's portrait of Queen Marie Leczinska, depicts the female gender occupied with some private, non-sexual activity, an activity that is not productive work done to make profit. These female portraits of women engaged in private "amusements," which make no reference to classical mythology, became more popular as the middle class gained cultural hegemony. In both types, there is a present absence of the signs of power prominent in contemporaneous male portraits, such as armor or the globe. The female gender continues to be reduced to the status of the Other, but now the female Other is increasingly portrayed in a domesticated and privatized way, rather than through gutted classical myths.”²⁵

In the salons of the 1750s, the audience also struggled to find the meaning and contexts within a

piece,
choosing
focus on
detailing
of a
Mythology
differently
the 18th
France had
secular



mythological
collectors
most times to
the technical
and provenance
piece.²⁶
was treated
than religion in
century, as
began to create
genre paintings

²⁵Bellhouse, “Visual Myths,” 124.

²⁶Hunter-Stiebel, *La Volupte du Gout*, 22

that mirrored the desire for a separation of church.²⁷ Pompadour strove to not only influence architecture and art, but her first influence is connected to mythology through her private theater group, Theatre de Petits Cabinets.²⁸ This troupe of artists performed for the nobility at Versailles and Pompadour starred in almost every show as goddesses, empresses, and even one instance as a slave.²⁹ Roles in these plays eventually would become a sort of “inside joke” between those at Versailles who saw the performances.

a. Goddess

As Pompadour began her life as Louis XV's basic mistress in 1745, she quite literally started her life over-she did not bring any of her dowry jewelry from her husband, no art, and no ownership of any of Charles's residences.³⁰ Her first experience with her own personal collection of items begins with her portrait, *Jeanne-Antoinette Poisson, Marquise de Pompadour, Represented as Diana the Huntress* (Fig.), painted by court painter, Jean-Marc Nattier. Nattier ha

Diana, the Roman goddess of the Hunt, is a popular role for women within the nobility of Europe to take on, The connection between the Roman Empire's pantheon and whatever empire the portrait depicted was to showcase the lineage of that new empire. France, for example, saw painting their nobility as these gods and other empire rulers knew that the aristocracy and common citizens would know the story of the pantheon and therefore connect the person to Rome. The people of France did not need to have the King under their control, but Louis XV was well-loved by most of the population for his taste in genre paintings.³¹

Pompadour, in this very early portrait, takes the guise of Diana the Huntress. She is brightly lit-sitting up straight, with a forward-facing expression that challenges the viewer to think of her

²⁷Hunter-Stiebel, *La Volupte du Gout*, 39

²⁸Hunter-Stiebel, *La Volupte du Gout* 44

²⁹Hunter-Stiebel, *La Volupte du Gout*, 44

³⁰Hunter-Stiebel, *La Volupte du Gout*, 44

³¹Hunter-Stiebel, *La Volupte du Gout*, 26

as anything less than the goddess she has become. For her, this portrait is about showing her power to pioneer her way through the first layer of the aristocracy as a new face at the Palace of Versailles. She needs a reliably consistent image to portray so that her rivals understand her virtues without facing her directly.

The movement of the darkened sky in the background adds an ominous air to her direct expression. A mountain or even a dense forest sits behind her left shoulder as if she has just exited from a thrilling hunt. She sits tall, victorious, yet delicate in the sloped relaxed pose of her shoulders. She clutches gently at the curved wooden hunting boy in her right hand. A golden quiver of feather-tipped arrows lays directly under her arm. The stretched skin of a leopard or cheetah is draped on top of her loose, cotton blouse. Her neck and the tops of her shoulders are bare and unblemished. A cape of rope and blue fabric follow the middle of her sternum to her right shoulder, where only a small patch of the fabric can be seen over her other shoulder.

b. Empress

The last two pieces of this study on Pompadour are a set of oil paintings called *A Sultana Taking Coffee* (Fig.) and *Sultana Embroidering* (Fig.). Both are the most dynamic portraits Pompadour has in her collection, using deeply saturated colors to represent the exotic atmosphere around her depiction as a *Sultana* or a sultan's wife. Here, Pompadour rests on the floor with her back against a low couch or even a low bed. The room is covered by a large, wrinkled, orange fabric that covers almost all of the ornate woodcarving on the room's walls. A window with quarreling, the techniques of applying a metal between decorative separated panes of glass. The diamond is surrounded by octagonal squares is a uniquely western design, put into this imaginary scene by the painter as showing the influence France has given to this mysterious nation. A foray into the exoticism of the Middle East and Asian cultures was not a new

phenomenon for Pompadour. Her most private bedroom was called the Cabinet Turc, after its ornately gilded use of Turkish patterned rugs and a Chinese-styled boudoir vanity.³² It is possible that this painting is set in her own bedchambers with the most telling items hidden by the orange curtain.

Through the title of this piece, *A Sultana Taking Coffee*, (Fig.) the impression is meant to have on the viewer is that Pompadour is the legally married wife to a middle-eastern, or even northern African nation's leader. This is connected heavily as France had just lost the Seven Year's War and was relying upon the colonies in Africa to bring in the revenue they had lost through the war effort. This kingdom of France is only one generation away from the revolution at this point in the 1750s, with Pompadour as the closest relationship to the king, some of the times she turned away public appearances of Louis XV for his sake were misinterpreted as her manipulating him. Therefore, Pompadour shoulders a lot of blame for these small actions she made to protect the mental state of the King after the war's end.

Even so with the outside reputation from the *Poissonades* and her actions, Pompadour is dressed modestly, though her outfit of flowing clothes is the most progressive she will have in her lifetime. The illusion of trousers or pants can be seen in the folding of her legs. These are not usually visible when standing and in this case are used as underclothes to keep her overskirt, the white and/or yellow fabric from sticking to her legs in the heat of this country. It shows Pompadour is listening to the contemporary fashion of her time to keep her image relevant to the public trends, or perhaps even set them.

IV. Conclusion

During her lifetime as *mistress en titre*, Madame de Pompadour was seen as a woman who was too heavy-handed with her wealth and blamed for France's failure during the Seven

³² Perrin Stein. "Amédée Van Loo's Costume Turc: The French Sultana." *The Art Bulletin* 78, no. 3 (1996): 417–38.

Year's War.³³ Her influence on the Late Rococo and then the transition into the NeoClassical mirrors societal change from a kingdom of gallantry to one of Revolution. Pompadour's artistic upbringing as a woman of the lower elite Bourgeois class meant that she was afforded a way into the aristocracy before she met Louis XV in 1745. Though the role of Mistress was a woman companion to the king, Pompadour used her education and trends of the Rococo to transform the public role to one of politics and advising. She was never absolute and not alone in the role of Mistress, but her influence on how a woman could display herself is too crucial to the artistic period of France's pre-Revolutionary history.

³³ Posner, "Mme. Pompadour," 76.

Images:



Figure 1. French School, *Madame de Pompadour*, H 63.5 x W 51.5 cm, 1751-1755, oil on canvas, Waddeson Manor, England



Figure 2. Francois Boucher, *The Rising of the Sun*, 1753, oil on canvas, 318 x 261 cm, Wallace Collection



Figure 3. Francois Boucher, *The Setting of the Sun*, 1752, oil on canvas, 318 x 261 cm, Wallace Collection.



Figure 4. Francois Boucher, *Madame de Pompadour*, 1759, oil on canvas, 91 x 68 cm, The Wallace Collection, United Kingdom.



Figure 5. Francois-Hubert Drouais, *Madame de Pompadour at her Tambour Frame*, 1763-4, oil on canvas, 217 x 156.8 cm, National Gallery of Art, London.



Figure 6. Jean-Marc Nattier, *Jeanne-Antoinette Poisson, Marquise de Pompadour*, 1746, oil on canvas, 101.3 x 81.5 cm, Chateau Versailles.



Figure 7. Carle-Andre Vanloo, *Sultana Drinking Coffee*, 1755, oil on canvas, 120 x 127 cm, State Hermitage.



Figure 8. Carle-Andre Vanloo, *Sultana Embroidering*, 1755, oil on canvas, 120 x 127 cm, State Hermitage.

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